

IOWA BIRD LIFE

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY THE
IOWA ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION

VOL. XXX

SEPTEMBER, 1960

NO. 3



OFFICERS OF THE IOWA ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION

President—Peter C. Petersen, Jr., Davenport, Iowa
Vice President—Lynn Willcockson, Des Moines, Iowa
Sec'y-Treas.—Dr. Myrle M. Burk, Route 2, Waterloo, Iowa
Librarian—Dr. J. Harold Ennis, Cornell College, Mt. Vernon, Iowa
Editor—Fred J. Pierce, Winthrop, Iowa

Executive Council:

Forrest G. Millikin, Sigourney, Iowa
Mrs. Myrle L. Jones, Estherville, Iowa
Robert L. Nicholson, Sioux City, Iowa
Dr. Peter P. Laude, Iowa City, Iowa

The Iowa Ornithologists' Union was organized at Ames, Iowa, February 28, 1923, for the study and protection of native birds and to promote fraternal relations among Iowa bird students.

The central design of the Union's official seal is the Eastern Goldfinch, designated State Bird of Iowa in 1933.

Publications of the Union: Mimeographed letters, 1923-1928; "The Bulletin," 1929-1930; "Iowa Bird Life," beginning 1931.

SUBSCRIPTION RATE: \$2.00 a year. Single copies 50c each. Subscription to the magazine is included in all paid memberships, of which there are four classes, as follows: Contributing Member, \$10.00 a year; Supporting Member, \$5.00 a year; Regular Member, \$2.00 a year; Junior Member (under 16 years of age), \$1.00 a year.

EDITORIAL AND PUBLICATION OFFICE
WINTHROP, IOWA



ARCTIC TOWHEE (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus arcticus*)

Male (upper figure) and female

From a painting by Earnest W. Steffen

THE ARCTIC TOWHEE ALONG THE WESTERN BORDER OF IOWA: A DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY*

By WILLIAM G. YOUNG WORTH

3119 East Second Street
SIOUX CITY, IOWA

The Arctic Towhee is one of those birds which has lost its name and identity. It has all been done in the name of progress or change. We older students of American bird life are accustomed to the names of Arctic Towhee, Red-backed Sandpiper and other familiar ones, and it is somewhat disconcerting to pick up bird journals and read about Rufous-sided Towhees, Dunlins and others.

The Arctic Towhee is the towhee of the short-grass country and mountains of the Missouri River drainage. The common Eastern Towhee barely extends its breeding range into southern Manitoba, but true to its name the Arctic Towhee extends its summer range far up into Saskatchewan and Alberta. It is equally at home in Nebraska, North and South Dakota, Wyoming and all the huge state of Montana.

Little seems to be known about the eastward extremes in the breeding range of this towhee. Many observers have long known that the Arctic Towhee is a regular breeding bird from central Nebraska westward. But how far east do they come? It was with no little interest when, on July 6, 1931, the writer found breeding towhees at Yankton, Yankton County, South Dakota. What kind of towhees were they? They proved to be both the Eastern and the Arctic. The latter form was scarce, but they were there. How much farther east do they breed? It seems that Yankton is about the eastern limit, for this writer has checked the breeding towhee population of Ponca State Park in northeast Nebraska and has found only the Eastern Towhee. From all the reports I have been able to find, the breeding area follows the actual valley of the Missouri River northwestward.

While other observers at Sioux City must have seen Arctic Towhees long before this writer, it seems that none of them differentiated between the more somber Eastern Towhee and the conspicuously spotted Arctic Towhee. On April 24, 1931, I collected the first specimen from this area (at McCook Lake, South Dakota). From then on during 1931 and 1932, I saw several Arctic Towhees and collected a small series, most of them later given to Dr. T. C. Stephens. Most of the Iowa specimens came from the Brower's Lake area in Woodbury County.

After the first flurry of collecting, the rarity of this towhee wore off. In later years I did not go out of my way to find them; nevertheless I have had several dozen records during the 30 intervening years. It is not unusual to find Arctic Towhees in one's own yard, if one will take the time to put the glass on every towhee that flits into the shrubbery. My first impressions were that here was a species primarily a fall migrant in western Iowa; but an equal number of spring records in the first 10 years dispelled this idea.

Winter records of towhees in the Sioux City area are not rare. The late Dr. T. C. Stephens and I discussed the matter and decided the Arctic Towhee was probably the wintering form. Our theory was enhanced by the fine winter field work of Jean Laffoon, who in 1940 produced five January records and one February record of the Arctic Towhees. Again in 1941, Laffoon reported this towhee once each in January and February.

* Both forms of towhee discussed in this article are given in the 5th edition (1957) of the A. O. U. Check-List under the common name of Rufous-sided Towhee, with the former Arctic Towhee given subspecific rank under the scientific name of *Pipilo erythrophthalmus arcticus*.—Ed.

The spring movement of the Arctic Towhee is not particularly early and indicates the main body of towhees moving pretty well into the southern states. My earliest record is April 24, 1931. The average of my spring arrival dates is about May 7. The latest spring departure date is May 18, 1956. The fall migration period seems to coincide with that of the Eastern Towhee, with arrival dates in both September and early October. The interesting thing about my fall records, however, is the fact that by mid-October the Eastern Towhee has already thinned out and most of them have departed. On the other hand, the Arctic Towhees are still around and can be found into November, with a few wintering with us.

The male Arctic Towhee can be quickly separated from the male Eastern Towhee by the liberal white spotting on the shoulders and wings. In the case of the female Arctic Towhee, the above-mentioned spotting is the best way to identify this bird. The head, back and upper breast of this towhee are more grayish than the wood-brown of the female Eastern Towhee, but for quick identification I don't consider this a good clue. Hybridization of various species of birds is common. One female Arctic Towhee in my collection is liberally spotted with white, and yet the upper body colors are very similar to those of a female Eastern Towhee.

The song and calls of this western towhee are much alike. While collecting at Yankton, South Dakota, I heard the songs of both species all day long and felt that I could pick out one towhee from the other. Taverner said the calls and song of the Spotted Towhee were more hoarse and less musical than those of the Eastern Towhee.

The following remarks are addressed to the readers who are interested in the old boundary and geological surveys made nearly 100 years ago.

One geological survey to the upper Missouri River region was made in 1856-'57 by Lieutenant G. K. Warren, with Dr. F. V. Hayden as surgeon and naturalist. This expedition went through the Sioux City area, and they reported the Arctic Towhee from such South Dakota points as Bon Homme Island, Bijoux Hills and Fort Pierre (these seem quite near in the present day).

Another group called the United States Northern Boundary Commission, with Dr. Elliott Coues as surgeon and naturalist, made their way up the Missouri River in 1873. They eventually moved to Pembina on the Red River of

Dedication

William Youngworth makes a fine contribution to our magazine by paying the cost of the accompanying colored plate, a beautiful water-color painting by Earnest W. Steffen.

He dedicates the article and the colored plate to the memory of his former teacher and friend, the late Dr. T. C. Stephens, of Morningside College, Sioux City.

The names of Arctic Towhee and Eastern Towhee were in common use during the years when Mr. Youngworth worked with Dr. Stephens, and it is his expressed wish that we retain them in this article as a tie-in with that period in the lives of two friends. While recognizing that these names have been changed by the American Ornithologists' Union and are no longer in general use, we gratefully bow to Mr. Youngworth's wishes.—F. J. P.

the North to start their survey of 850 miles of our northern border from the above spot to the Rocky Mountains. The common Towhee was the form found at Pembina, but Dr. Coues in taking three specimens mentioned that the species already showed signs of in-breeding with the Arctic Towhee. Shortly afterward when the party reached the area of the Mouse River, North Dakota, the Arctic Towhee was the only form found and a specimen was taken to establish the eastern limits of this form as a breeding bird. Dr. Coues went on to state this towhee was an abundant bird of the upper Missouri River bottom land; while they were not found on the open prairie or along the Milk River in Montana, they were again found in the Rocky Mountains.

Dr. Coues went into some detail on the discussion of the songs and calls of the two towhees under consideration and explained that the song was similar, but "a little lower and more wiry." It was the call note of the Arctic Towhee, however, which he stressed most. He said it was entirely different from that of the Eastern Towhee but it curiously resembled a Catbird. He also explained at some length (Birds of the Northwest) the intergradation of the Arctic Towhee and the Eastern Towhee.

To summarize we must state that as a breeding bird the Arctic Towhee almost reaches the borders of Iowa, at Yankton, South Dakota. As a migrant this towhee is a regular spring and fall visitor all along the western edge of Iowa. As a winter visitor it is not rare and is apparently hardy enough to winter in well sheltered spots. My first specimen record was made in 1931. I have made several other specimen records at various times of the year. This summary would not be complete without a very frank statement made by Dr. Jean Laffoon. He said (1941): "It is the writer's belief that if all observers were able to distinguish this species from the Red-eyed Towhee, there would be many more records of it."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Coues, Elliott. 1874. Birds of the Northwest. Washington, Government Printing Office. Pp. 173-176.
- Coues, Elliott. 1878. Field Notes on the Birds Observed in Dakota and Montana along the Forty-ninth Parallel during the Seasons of 1873 and 1874. Washington. Bull. U. S. Geological Survey, Vol. 4, No. 2.
- DuMont, Philip A. 1934. A Revised List of the Birds of Iowa. Univ. of Iowa Studies in Natural History, Iowa City. P. 145.
- Laffoon, Jean. 1941. Late Fall and Winter Bird Records, 1938 to 1941, in the Sioux City Area. Proc. Iowa Acad. of Science, Vol. 48, p. 435.
- Rapp, William F., Jr., et al. 1958. Revised Check-List of Nebraska Birds. Occasional Papers No. 5. Nebr. Ornith. Union, Crete, Nebraska. P. 30.
- Stephens, Thomas C. 1945. An Annotated Bibliography of South Dakota Ornithology. Published privately by the author. P. 19.
- Stephens, Thomas C. 1957. The Birds of Dakota County, Nebraska. Occasional Papers No. 3, Nebraska Ornith. Union, Crete, Nebraska. P. 24.
- Stephens, Thomas C. 1957. An Annotated Bibliography of Iowa Ornithology. Occasional Papers No. 4, Nebraska Ornith. Union, Crete, Nebraska. P. 80.
- Stephens, Thomas C., & William Youngworth. 1947. Fall and Winter Bird Records. Proc. Iowa Acad. Science, Vol. 54, pp. 380-381.
- Stephens, Thomas C., & William G. Youngworth, William R. Felton, Jr. 1955. The Birds of Union County, South Dakota. Occasional Papers No. 1. Nebraska Ornith. Union, Crete, Nebraska. P. 32.
- Taverner, P. A. 1928. Birds of Western Canada. National Museum of Canada, Ottawa. Pp. 298-299.
- Youngworth, William G. 1932. Recent Bird Notes from Southern South Dakota. Wilson Bulletin, Vol. 44, p. 43.

A NESTING OF THE TURKEY VULTURE IN JONES COUNTY

By ROBERT F. VANE

2220 Grande Avenue, S.E.
CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA

Byron Arnold, a science teacher at Washington High School, Cedar Rapids, whose hobby is snakes and particularly the capturing of rattlesnakes, had told me of a Turkey Vulture nest he observed while visiting a rattlesnake den on the Maquoketa River near Monticello. Two eggs had been seen in the nest on May 1, and Mr. Arnold kindly consented to lead a trip back to that area.

On Sunday, May 22, 1960, a bright, warm day, Arnold and I left Cedar Rapids, meeting J. Harold Ennis along the way and continuing to the farm of Galen Hein, a farmer-naturalist who lives some few miles east of Monticello. Hein is a man of 57 who has had a life-long interest in natural history and has hunted and captured rattlesnakes since he was 10 years old. He was able to tell us a great deal concerning the botany and bird life of the area as well as the herpetology. There were few of our native birds of which he had not found the nest. On two occasions he had found Long-eared Owls nesting; and Pileated Woodpecker nests were annual discoveries. Turkey Vulture nests had been known and occupied for some years.

Our party of four, Arnold, Hein, Ennis and I, left the Hein farm to bounce our way over a lane toward the cliffs along the Maquoketa River some miles east of the Painted Rocks Wilderness Area. It was in this latter area that Ennis had found and recorded a nesting of the Pileated Woodpecker (see *Iowa Bird Life*, Vol. XXV, No. 3, pp. 50-53.)

Our way led through a deserted farm, through fields grown over with weeds, and on to a heavy woodland. Here we left the car, Hein bringing along a heavy rope which he said would be useful in swinging down to the mouth of the Turkey Vulture cave. We continued on our way, walking through waist-high ferns, with the "Teacher, Teacher" of the Ovenbird's song resounding all around us. Soon we came to the rocky limestone cliffs overlooking the Maquoketa River and overhead we could see a circling Turkey Vulture with others in the distance.

Arnold immediately went to a rattlesnake-den area, while Hein took Ennis and me a bit farther along the wooded cliff. The area around the nest was not an exposed, bare cliff as I had imagined it would be, but was a wooded, shaded cliff some 75 to 100 feet above the river. It was not vertical in the nesting area by any means, and yet the slope was far too steep to clamber around without help. Hein expertly tied the rope around a tree trunk and, hanging onto the rope, we edged down the steep, dark incline to stop at the entrance to the cave in which the vulture nest was located.

The Turkey Vulture cave had a rough, triangular entrance perhaps 8 feet high. The cave was shaped like a pyramid lying on its side about 12 feet long. The two large eggs were lying on debris on the floor of the cave at its innermost point. The interior of the cave would have been pitch-dark except for a shaft of weak light which came from some unseen opening to illuminate the eggs; also for air-conditioning according to Mr. Hein.

We were greatly excited to see the nest of this unearthly bird. We had read of nestings in hollow trees (see *Iowa Bird Life* Vol. XXVIII, No. 3, p. 60) but this was our first experience with a nest of this bird. Our eyes became accustomed to the dim light, and the eggs stood out more sharply. But neither Ennis nor I felt like crawling on hands and knees to the back of the cave in this rattlesnake area.

Using the rope for help, then, we climbed back up the slope, ever on the lookout for timber rattlesnakes. Two had been caught there by Arnold on his May 1 trip. Reaching the top, we continued on east along the crest, carefully looking and walking around rocky outcrops.

Our attention was soon diverted to a Scarlet Tanager which Hein spotted, and in a moment the female appeared with nesting material in her bill. Together they flew to a horizontal limb of a red oak, and we watched as the female skillfully worked on her half-completed nest some 70 feet from the ground. We watched them for perhaps 15 minutes, the male being particularly bright inasmuch as it had a yellow band across its rump and down its flanks beneath its wings. Was this xanthochroism? We thought so.

Our walk continued on the cliff top, and all except Arnold had passed a fallen tree when a shout from Arnold spun us around to see him pointing to a 4-foot timber rattler neatly coiled along the trunk of the fallen tree. The coil of the snake was about the size of a large dinner plate. His attractive colors were ochre and black, the black chevrons beautifully conspicuous, and his rattle was vibrating rapidly.

Soon Arnold had it secured in a noose. His foot slid along the reptile's body to rest on the head, and, grasping it firmly behind the skull, Arnold raised it into the air to drop it into his collecting bag. Ennis and I were thrilled to watch the smooth handling of this beautiful, lethal-appearing specimen.

A bit farther on the first of several five-lined skinks made its appearance. It had been sunning itself but quickly darted up a tree trunk to escape Arnold. One final grasp and Arnold's hand came back with the writhing tail of



TURKEY VULTURE NESTING CAVE

Galen Hein (left) and J. Harold Ennis at mouth of the cave in which the Turkey Vultures nested. (From a color slide by Vane).

the lizard while the skink continued tailless up the tree. It was a new fact to me that this skink could, almost at will, disengage the muscles of its tail to leave the tail behind while it dashed off to safety. A bit later, however, a complete unharmed skink was caught.

We now left the cliff top from which we had been watching soaring Turkey Vultures in the distance. We back-tracked through the woods past clumps of maiden-hair fern and rattlesnake fern to reach our car at the edge of the wood.

Mr. Hein had another area near by to show us. We retraced our route to the deserted farmstead and, taking another lane, again crossed overgrown fields to arrive at a woodland, upstream a mile or so from our previous stop. Again we left the car to hike through the woods to the cliff's edge over the Maquoketa River. A Yellow-throated Vireo was singing high overhead, and darting out from a lofty perch was an Olive-sided Flycatcher which we watched at length. Again we visited a rattlesnake den where a rattlesnake trap had been installed by a neighboring farmer. We hiked to several beautiful outlooks from which we could see the many bends and windings of the Maquoketa River far below us.

As we walked back to the car we turned to see circling in the air eight Turkey Vultures and we hoped that they would long remain in the area as a part of our interesting avifauna.

A SURVEY OF WINTERING BALD EAGLES*

By ELTON FAWKS

Route No. 1, Box 112
EAST MOLINE, ILLINOIS

For several years I have been concerned with the apparently smaller numbers of immature Bald Eagles in my area. Considerable correspondence has been carried on with many people, including the late Charles Broley. This correspondence clearly indicates that much study is needed. It also indicates that nesting studies are difficult in most areas. Here in the Mississippi valley we have many wintering Bald Eagles. A detailed study comparing the adult and immature birds should show success or failures of the nesting seasons. The purpose of this paper is to show the results of the past two winters and plans for the future.

A brief history of wintering Bald Eagles in the Tri-City area seems in order. Since about the year 1900, up to three dozen eagles wintered at the Sears Dam at Milan, Illinois. This is on the Rock River a short distance upstream from the mouth of this river where it empties into the Mississippi. This is directly across from Credit Island at Davenport, Iowa. Water remained open all winter at the dam. In those years the Mississippi flowing through the Tri-Cities area froze over. As the years passed some changes caused the river to remain open at several spots. This caused a build-up in our wintering eagles. In the 1930's the roller dams were built. Later a large power plant was built in Bettendorf, Iowa, and later the Alcoa plant. Both of these, by the dumping of warm waste water into the river, caused open areas to remain all winter. These changes have brought an increase in our wintering Bald Eagles so that in the 1950's we had an average from 75 to 85 each winter.

Although the local birders were aware that eagles were present, we did not realize how many until we organized our highly successful Christmas Count. This paper will deal largely with counts made in our Christmas count

* A paper presented at the annual meeting of Iowa Ornithologists' Union, Waterloo, Iowa, May 14, 1960.

area. The numbers of Bald Eagles have increased in our local area due to the open water in the frozen rivers, but they seem to have increased elsewhere in the 1950's. Much study should be made on this. Although Christmas counts through the years do not indicate many wintering eagles, I believe that eagles were unreported in some cases.

An article in the Spring and Summer issue of the Audubon Bulletin (No. 17, 1926, published by the Illinois Audubon Society), by Dr. T. E. Musselman of Quincy, Illinois, tells about a number of large packing houses on the Mississippi River 50 years ago. In those days, with bacon and ham selling for 7¢ to 12¢ a pound, much meat was considered waste and dumped into the river. "Hundreds of Bald Eagles came down from the northland each winter and fed upon" this waste material. He goes on to state that some eagles still come to Keokuk although the packing houses have disappeared.

During the years I have made a few counts of the ratio between adults and immature Bald Eagles. It was not until the winter of 1958-'59 that a fairly detailed survey was made. The year before I had made four late winter counts and in two of these I counted 58 adults and 1 immature, and 58 and no immature. These with two smaller counts gave me a ratio that I now know was too small a sample to be of any value. As the census was mainly in the Christmas count area, I shall report that result first. The count area was divided into: Campbell's Island; Lock & Dam No. 14 at Hampton, Illinois; Moline and Bettendorf river front; Lock & Dam No. 15 at Davenport, Iowa; Credit Island; Milan and Rock Island, Illinois. I used my counts as well as many from Pete Petersen Jr. Counts were made on 44 days. These did not always cover the complete area though many of them did.

In these counts during the winter of 1958-'59, 590 Bald Eagles were sighted. Of these 487 were adult birds and 103 were immatures. This gave us a ratio of 82.5424 to 17.4576. In 1959-'60 a total of 1,327 eagles were checked. These were found on 75 counts. Eagles appeared sooner and stayed later. However, the larger number of eagles was because of more counts. In fact, we had a larger number of eagles for a short while in 1958-'59 than we had in 1959-'60. Numbers were more constant in the past winter. Totals on this survey were 1,123 adults to 204 immatures. Percentage was 84.6237 to 15.3763. This is a drop of about 12 per cent in young. In both counts additional areas were checked. These were birds found just out of the count area, birds at Lock & Dams 13, 16 and 17. These add in the first winter, 66 adults and 12 immatures, and change the percentages to 82.7844 to 17.2155. In the past winter we add 213 adults and 43 immatures. Percentages are 84.3967 to 15.6033. Both of these give us a slightly larger ratio of young.

I have made detailed comparison of each of these smaller areas in our Christmas count area. These will not be reported at this time. However, it is worthy of note to consider two of these areas. At Lock 14 the immatures dropped from 22.449 to 13.8462 between the winter of 1958-'59 and 1959-'60. At Lock 15 the drop was from 23.40 to 16.51. It is worthy of note that ducks and gulls disappeared in late January, 1960, from these two areas. We have always found ducks, and many rarer ones at Lock 14. At present I cannot understand why the ratio dropped so severely in these two areas.

I shall report on two counts made by others. Robert Wade of Fish and Wildlife Service, Fulton, Illinois, made a count during the week of February 7, 1960, from Lock 14 through the Lock 13, Thomson-Savanna area, and found 72 adults and 13 immatures (ratio 84.7 to 15.3). Alois J. Weber sent Petersen the winter count of Mr. Ingram, Superintendent of the bridge at Lock 19 at Keokuk. Out of a total of 159 eagles sighted, 148 were adults against 11 immatures. This figures 93.0817 to 6.9183. Other reports I have from this area would improve the ratio, giving us more young.

On January 31, 1960, Petersen and I with Mike Yeast drove to Dubuque, Iowa, and counted eagles from Lock & Dam 11 through Lock & Dam 16 at Muscatine, Iowa. Robert Trail of Aledo and Ted Greer of Joy, Illinois, counted from there to Keokuk. We found a total of 117 eagles in the fog but 104 were clearly seen. Of these, 82 were adults and 22 immatures; ratio was 78.25 to 21.75. I should like to divide this into northern and southern portions with the Tri-Cities being the dividing line. In the northern portion we found 35 adults to 7 immatures; percentage was 83.333 to 16.666. In the southern portion 47 adults and 15 immatures were sighted. This gives us a percentage of 74.8 to 25.2. It is my impression that more young eagles travel farther south in the winter. In the season of 1958-'59, the ratio in my count area remained about the same until February 15, when it increased from 17.30 to 26.245. In the season from October 27 through December 31, 1960, we had 17.25 per cent immatures. From March 10 through April 2, we had 23 percent. This compares with the season's total of 15.3768.

To be of major value, this sort of study should be enlarged. With this in mind I have contacted several state bird groups and asked them to assist in a large-scale survey. My plans call for two types of counts. One would be an all-day count over the whole area, and the other would be of areas such as I have just reported. The one-day count would fall on the Sunday following the annual aerial survey of ducks made by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. On this survey eagles are counted but not aged. This aerial survey covers only part of the wintering range of the Bald Eagle and our count could supplement it.

In conclusion, I wish to state that I am not an expert but a seeker of needed facts. Much is needed in the way of knowledge of the Bald Eagle. It is surprising how little is known. Even the simple fact of the age at which the birds become adults is confused. Most books state this to be at age four, a few say at age three, and Charles Broley has stated to me many times that the birds become adults at age five.

I hope also not to appear as an alarmist. Truthfully, I have been alarmed. When we consider, however, that Bald Eagles supposedly live for many years and a pair would have only to replace themselves over a long span of life, then perhaps these low ratios need not be alarming. In fact, if one pair of eagles would raise one young, and at the end of the nesting season we would have a ratio of two to one, the next year it would be 50-50. This would give us a high ratio and would increase until we had more young than adults.

But in nature we do not have this kind of nesting success. Some thought along this line would show us that the 50-50 ratio some of us remember and which has been reported at times, is the abnormal ratio. Carrying this line of thought to the lower ratio we now have, we could work out something like this: If a pair of eagles had a breeding span of 10 years, they would have 10 years to replace themselves. Or in one year 10 pairs would have only to raise two eagles to adulthood. This with the small number of young maturing, might give us a ratio similar to the one we now have and might be supporting. It is my impression, however, that this ratio is too low to be supporting. A larger survey might give us more favorable ratios. (As a postscript on September 15, 1960, I have a letter from Gail Shickley of Nebraska, who writes of eagles reported to her from five locations, as follows: 17 adults to 19 immatures, or a percentage of 47.22 and 52.77. In the North Platte area, where from 10 to more eagles roosted, counts showed 42 adults to 157 juveniles, or a percentage of 21.22 adults to 78.88 immatures. The peak number of eagles counted at one time was 84 birds).

Volunteers are needed to expand this study. A fact sheet on data obtainable in winter has been prepared. It has been approved by Harold S. Peters of the National Audubon Society to go with similar data from other regions. This data sheet and other information is available from the writer or Pete Petersen, Jr.



IOWA ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION FALL MEETING, MCGREGOR, IOWA, SEPTEMBER 11, 1960
 The meeting was held at Effigy Mounds National Monument and Pike's Peak State Park, on Saturday and Sunday, September 10 and 11. Here the group is looking at a bird taken out of Pete Petersen's banding net. The Secretary's official report is not yet in, but we are told that 54 persons from 15 Iowa towns attended this very successful meeting. Photograph by Mrs. Anita Lindemann, McGregor).

A TRIP TO THE CAYLER PRAIRIE

By WILLIAM YOUNG WORTH

3119 East Second Street
SIOUX CITY, IOWA

The Cayler Prairie is the latest prairie preserve to be acquired by the citizens of Iowa. It is located in Lakeville Township, Dickinson County, and is about 4 miles from the Lakeside Laboratory on West Lake Okoboji (NW quarter of Sect. 17, Twp. 99 N, Range 37 W of 5th P. M.).

I like to think of this prairie as the last link in the Shimek "Chain of Prairies." The late Doctor B. Shimek of the University of Iowa worked up and proposed a fine plan for a national prairie preserve in the above area, but nothing ever came of it. The area included hundreds of acres of rolling hills on both sides of the Little Sioux River. Some of the southern prairie areas have been farmed, and all of it has been heavily pastured or used for hay land. The net result is that the trained botanist would be a bit disappointed after visiting the Hayden and Kalsow Prairies with their verdant native prairie growth. It appeared to this writer and his wife, on a trip there on May 30, 1960, that much of the native prairie plant life has disappeared. Some of the plants which still grow there and can be found in late May are the blue-eyed grass, pasque flower, buttercup, blue lupine, wild indigo, birdfoot violet, sorrel, and at least one of the coral bells. Of course there are many other kinds of grasses and flowering plants, but delay in following up the Shimek plan certainly depleted the areas of many more kinds of flora.

The rank growth of the other two prairie preserves was not evident here due to recent haying, but if the area is left untouched for a few years the habitat will be more attractive to nesting birds than it is now. After tramping over most of the area and spending several hours in making observations, it was determined that only a few birds nested on the area. The most common bird actually nesting there was the Meadowlark. Several pairs of Redwinged Blackbirds were nesting on the small pond area in the southern part of preserve. In this same area we decided there were three pairs of Yellowthroats. Bobolinks sang beautifully overhead, but they were not common and it was thought that they might be limited to about three pairs. Two pairs of Horned Larks were seen. After an exhaustive search, I was definitely able to pin down three singing Savannah Sparrows and four pairs of Grasshopper Sparrows. Why I missed both Lark and Vesper Sparrows is something I could not understand. I had hoped to find Field Sparrows and had the faintest hope that I might pin down a breeding Clay-colored Sparrow, but found neither. I think the reason for the lack of Field Sparrows is, because of heavy haying, not a single shrub or tree of nesting size is on the area. While both above species supposedly rarely nest on the ground, I think a few shrubs are the encouragement they need. Dickcissels were found on the edges of the preserve; there they had handy wires to perch on.

One bird helped make the trip very much worth while. Near the eastern boundary we saw a brown blob crouched low to the ground and we knew at once we were seeing a Burrowing Owl in Iowa after an absence of nearly 15 years. A look at the burrow showed occupancy with many shreds of rabbit fur scattered about. The second bird stayed in the burrow all the time we were there unless they changed shifts, as four or five walks to the burrow always resulted in flushing just the one owl. It is probable that the pasture east of the preserve might harbor more Burrowing Owls, as it looked quite like owl country.

While making a swing across one of the higher knolls, we found the den of a red fox, with the usual den litter of fur and feathers. Several

pheasant wings were scattered about and even the head of a tiny pig. Near the entrance lay a freshly killed meadow mouse, which possibly the pups were playing with when we bothered them. An enigma was the body of an adult fox found floating in a pond a short distance below the den.

In conclusion, from our observations we would suggest that, if possible, the Conservation Commission should make provision for a small parking area near the preserve and a stile or two constructed, as at other preserves. The gate should be sturdy and locked to all but Commission service personnel. The friendly farmer lady near the preserve told me that at the present time one and all drive in and over the area. This should not be, even though the writer was also guilty. But we stayed in the track of what appeared to have been a big truck and did not stray from it, although we saw evidence of vehicles having been driven all over the area.

Further conclusions are that in time, with stricter supervision, this prairie area will probably come back in good shape; and tall, heavier growth will bring more bird life. Certainly the plant life will have a chance to mature and bear seed. This was not possible under past farming practices. And finally, if red foxes get too numerous they should be thinned out.

GENERAL NOTES

Oldsquaw at Cedar Rapids.—One of the birds reported on our Christmas census, taken December 19, 1959, was the Oldsquaw Duck. This duck wintered on Cedar Lake and was observed at various times by members of the Cedar Rapids Bird Club. My last sight record was April 8, 1960. It was interesting to note some change in the bird's plumage with the coming of spring.—LILLIAN SERBOUSEK, 1226 Second Street, S.W., Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Praise for Earnest Steffen's Upland Plover Painting.—The picture of the Upland Plover in our June issue is beautiful. Mr. Steffen has portrayed the spirit of the bird more truly than any other bird artist whom I know. The presence of the wild strawberries shows the true habitat very well. It is low prairie, not marsh, the type of soil where wild strawberries grow. Ever since childhood I have been partial to this bird, and his picture recalled the place we used to see them. We had a field of wild hay where there were three patches of wild strawberries. We used to get our fill of their sweetness in this field. The plovers were always a part of the picture, whistling and gracefully alighting on the fence posts.—MYRLE M. BURK, Route No. 2, Waterloo, Iowa.

Data on Yellow-crowned Night Heron Requested.—The Yellow-crowned Night Heron until recently was considered a casual visitor in some parts of Iowa, and was unknown in others. In 1956 it nested in Crocker Woods on the Des Moines River in Des Moines and has returned each season since then. This fact, together with the report of Peter Petersen Jr. that they nested this year in heronries at Rock Island and New Boston, both just across the Mississippi River in Illinois, makes it appear they could very well be nesting in other parts of this state.

An effort is being made to assemble all the information available regarding the Iowa status of this heron. If all of our members will report any observations of Yellow-crowned Night Herons, giving dates, locations, and numbers, mentioning particularly the presence of immatures, we should in time learn to what extent the species is extending its nesting range, as seems to be the case. Will you please send any records to me?—WOODWARD H. BROWN, 4815 Ingersoll Avenue, Des Moines 12, Iowa.

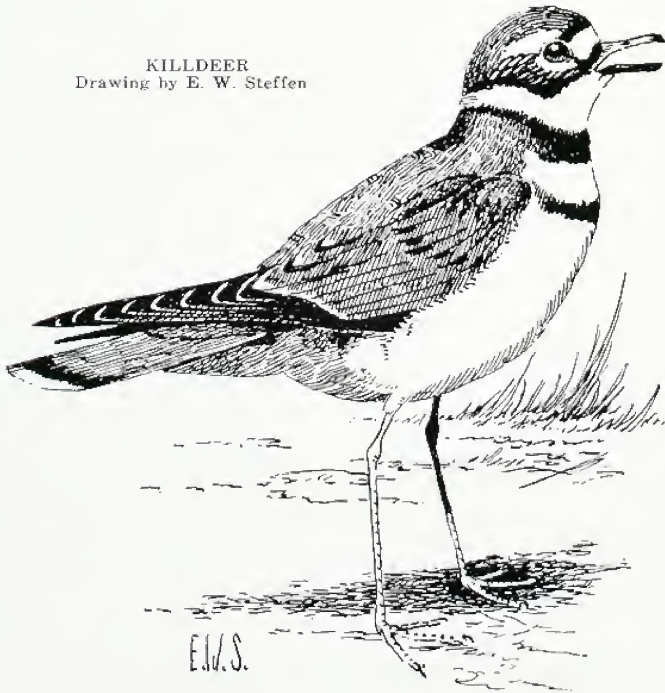
Records from Several Localities in Iowa.—In the latter part of January, 1960, my daughter (Mrs. F. M. Braley) and I had to make a trip to northeast Iowa. At this time the roads were treacherous and to avoid some very icy

paving and blacktop, we came back on January 28 by way of the Aurora to Winthrop road, which was graveled. About half way between the towns we were startled to see a Prairie Chicken cross the road. There was no traffic, and we stopped with the hope to catch another glimpse of it. The bird came back on the road and walked back and forth in front of us, until we felt we could take no more time. My last record of one was 27 years ago, in practically the same neighborhood.

Our next thrill came in March. Heavy snows had blanketed the entire area—only a few highways were open—where Horned Larks and Longspurs were numerous. In the late afternoon of March 11, we were driving east of Shenandoah. Short-eared Owls sat on many fence posts. Suddenly a Barn Owl swooped down and lit in the snow not 6 feet from our car. The next day the performance was repeated. Then the snow began to melt. Although we saw the Barn Owl for several days flying with the Short-eared Owls over the adjoining fields, we did not see it again at so close range. At the time this bird was flying over the area 2 or 3 miles east of Shenandoah, a farmer living several miles west of town brought in a Barn Owl for Mr. Braley to identify. He had found it dead in his barn.

On March 29, 1960, a call came from a friend in town who had been watching an unusual bird from the window; by checking a bird book, the conclusion was that it was a Woodcock. Skeptically, we went to investigate. I watched at the edge of the lawn as my daughter approached the bushes—when from under her feet a Woodcock flew out. It hit the side of a neighboring house where it was thrown on the roof of a low porch. This dazed it and we had plenty of time to observe it before it recovered.—MRS. ROBERT I. BORDNER, Keenan Apartments, Shenandoah, Iowa.

KILLDEER
Drawing by E. W. Steffen



Turkey Vulture in Northwest Iowa.—While the Turkey Vulture still nests in the Homer, Nebraska, area near Sioux City, it is not often seen on the Iowa side of the border, so I am giving two recent Iowa records. On June 14, 1960, I saw a vulture near the J. A. Sturtevant farm, along the Big Sioux River just north of the city limits. Again, on June 15, I saw a lone vulture flying over the heavy timber just north of Smithland, Iowa, which is about 30 miles southeast of the city.—WILLIAM YOUNGWORTH, 3119 East Second Street, Sioux City, Iowa.

Burrowing Owl Record near Waterloo.—On the afternoon of July 17, 1960, I was riding along a country road a few miles northeast of Waterloo with my husband and George Faulkner, when we saw a bird alight on a nearby fence-post. We saw that it was a small owl with very long, unfeathered legs. It flew as we stopped the car, but lit again on a post ahead of us. Driving slowly, we stopped at a point where we could see the bird in good light and observe it very carefully. It was a Burrowing Owl, much to our surprise. We had all seen this species in the western states and in Florida, but this was our first sight of one in Iowa. When we came back along the same road a half hour later, the owl was again on a post beside the road. We went back to check in the next three evenings and found the owl each time, and on the second night we saw another owl which we believed was the female of the pair. We hoped we had discovered a nesting pair of Burrowing Owls, but in later drives in that vicinity and on to Dunkerton (which is about 6 miles), we failed to see either bird.—MRS. JOHN M. BARLOW, 4304 Hillside Drive, Cedar Falls, Iowa.

Bird Notes from Western Iowa.—On May 20, 1960, Rev. Mills of Goldfield and I went afield looking for warblers. As he voiced interest in my bird-banding activities, I put up a net, though not hoping for much success since the cover was not very favorable. Forty-five minutes later we returned and found 15 birds, an Orchard Oriole among them. This was a beautiful male, which I banded and released. Returning to the area two days later, I found this bird still present, and I saw him feeding, with the shiny new band quite conspicuous. This was my first record of the Orchard Oriole. On May 22, I found a pair of them in the trees near my home at Lehigh. Apparently they decided not to nest, as they did not remain in the vicinity.

Late one evening at home, I heard a male Baltimore Oriole making a fuss near its nest, and I looked up to see it drive a Blue Jay through the trees. I thought it was protecting its young, but a few minutes later I saw what it was actually protecting. The same scolding and fighting was heard, and I saw the oriole drive the jay away from a baby Mourning Dove lying on the ground. It appeared that the jay was attempting to kill the young dove. I quickly flushed the jay out of the area, banded the nestling dove, and took it to an open area near its timid, frightened parents, which were making no attempt to fight the jay. One parent flew down to care for the nestling. Several days later I had the satisfaction to see it flying.

In the summer of 1959, while visiting with Mrs. Officer, capable bird student of Fort Dodge, this observation was made. Her neighbors had begun to remove a cottonwood tree which contained a Baltimore Oriole nest with eggs. Enough time was taken to remove the entire branch and fasten it to an elm tree about 30 feet distant. It was 20 feet lower than the original site, and we expected them to abandon the nest. Subsequent investigation showed the orioles to claim the nest, after fluttering about it for an hour. Eventually they raised their young from it—a tribute to the strong nesting instinct!—DEAN M. ROOSA, Lehigh, Iowa.



PIED-BILLED GREBE NESTS

Photographed at Swan Lake, Johnson County, Iowa, June 9, 1959, by Fred W. Kent.
The upper nest is somewhat more pretentious than usual and well out of water, while the bottom nest is barely out of water.

Mockingbird in Monona County.—The Mockingbird is uncommon in northwest Iowa, so I would like to give the following record. On June 15, 1960, while on a field trip to the Ticonic area of eastern Monona County, I drove to the old Grant Township Cemetery and was greeted at the gate by the song of a Mockingbird. I soon located the singer, in the top of a tall spruce tree near a very large heap of tree trimmings. I could only conjecture that the female had her nest in the brush pile because each time the male returned from his flight song, he would return to the same perch. I pointed out the bird to the sexton; it was the first time he had seen or heard the bird. He had two power mowers, one a riding affair and the other an equally noisy push-type. He said he interchanged using them and could hear nothing above the racket. I sympathized with him, but told him to please see that no one disturbed the bird, since the Mockingbird was a rare summer visitor to his finely kept little cemetery. He assured me that he would.—WILLIAM YOUNGWORTH, 3119 East Second Street, Sioux City, Iowa.

Spring and Summer Notes from the Iowa City Region.—Severe winter weather with heavy snow and below-freezing temperatures into the first three weeks of March, 1960, apparently delayed spring arrivals, so it was March 26 before the first spring bird was seen—a very late date, indeed. Perhaps that would also explain the scarcity of Mallards and Pintails, even with large water areas, and where the year before there were estimated over 50,000 of these. Possibly these early ducks, having been held back so long, just went on over, for only scattered pairs and very small flocks were seen. But there were large numbers of all the other ducks through April and May in the Coralville Reservoir area. The high water level in the Reservoir (80% full at one time), flooded fields, and ponds attracted the best shore-bird population in years; this extended into the first week of June. Among the early species, Snipe, Pectorals and Yellowlegs were abundant; Golden Plovers from April 4 to May 22, with one flock of 200 seen by the Laudes; both Godwits on May 1; an Avocet on May 4; and on May 7, a cold rainy day, a Glossy Ibis feeding steadily beside a marsh pond, seemingly so out of place; it was also seen by Lillian Serbousek.



WESTERN KINGBIRD
(F. W. Kent photograph)



BLUE-WINGED TEAL
(F. W. Kent photograph)

The late shore-bird season was very fine, extending into the first week of June. After the Least Sandpiper came the Semipalmated with sizeable flocks of Dunlins and White-rumped, the latter in flocks up to 200. They stayed around long enough and at close enough range to permit careful study of them. We found that size, shape, voice, and detailed breast and shoulder markings make a better set of clues for identification than the white rumps which could only be seen at certain angles in these fast-flying birds. Among these larger groups were also Stilt, Baird's, Sanderling and two Turnstones in transition plumage.

The larger water area also attracted all the herons. Yellow-crowned Night Herons were seen several times with one group of five on May 2 feeding at close range. An adult Little Blue Heron was seen by the Laudes on April 23, and Egrets appeared at about the same time but continued on into the summer in numbers from 20 to 50, with some evidence that they nested in a rookery at the upper end of the Reservoir. Little Green Herons seemed almost abundant.

Swan Lake and the nearby area was again attractive to nesting Blue-winged Teal, Mallards, Ruddy Ducks (we saw both adults and five young on August 13), large numbers of Coots, Grebes, Gallinules, as well as a number of Least Bitterns. An American Bittern was heard "pumping" in the first two weeks of June and an immature was seen on August 13. Curiously, the pumping came mostly from a clover field adjoining the marsh. On May 28, a female Hooded Merganser with six very small young put on a distraction display in a roadside ditch near the Reservoir.

Among the other birds, there was a marked scarcity of Hermit Thrushes, a good migration of Fox Sparrows, a Henslow's Sparrow on June 7 and 9. It was singing (if one could call it that) even at night. A Western Kingbird was photographed on May 30, a new record for us. We had a fine warbler migration with a new record of a Worm-eating Warbler in the deep woods at Lake Macbride. This warbler was observed at close range.—FRED W. KENT, 7 East Market Street, Iowa City, Iowa.



MARBLED GODWIT

(Photographed by F. W. Kent, May 1, 1960)

Lark Bunting in Winneshiek County.—While going to Spillville, Iowa, I saw a male Lark Bunting on the side of the road. I stopped the car and got out to get a better look. I walked up to within 15 feet of the bird before it flew across the road and sat on a fence post. I watched it for two or three minutes and then it flew down into the grass. I got back into the car and was about to go when I saw a female sitting on a fence post in front of me on a 90-degree bend in the road. The approximate location was $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles west of Spillville on a blacktopped road.—DAVE PEARSON, 8844 Mississippi Boulevard, N.W., Minneapolis 21, Minnesota.

(The above note was sent to us by Dr. Walter J. Breckenridge, of the Minnesota Museum of Natural History, Minneapolis. He mentioned the extent of Mr. Pearson's experience with birds in the field, and that he considered him to be a reliable observer.—Ed.)

Roseate Spoonbill Observed at Union Slough.—During the afternoon of August 16, 1960, I was conducting Director R. D. Van Duesen, Michigan State University Kellogg Bird Sanctuary, and Charles Van Kirk of Goodrich, Michigan, on a tour of Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge, when we noticed a strange pinkish-white bird arise from Habitat Unit No. 3 marsh. It soared around that marsh and us for an hour. This long, slim bird soared within 100 feet of Van Duesen's cameras and he obtained 15 feet of colored movies of the spoonbill with telephoto lens. Single frame exposures will be made available to the refuge in the near future. The stranger was identified as a spoonbill because of the spatula at the end of its relatively long beak. This spatula could be seen with the refuge's 20-power spotting 'scope, and with 7x50 and 7x35 binoculars whenever our guest was in sight. It could easily be seen with unaided eyes at 2,000 feet.

We identified the stranger as an immature Roseate Spoonbill (yearling) due to its pinkish rather than rose colorations. The Roseate Spoonbill *Ajaia ajaja* is listed in the 1957 A.O.U. Check-List as breeding on the Gulf Coast and

wandering to . . . northern Utah, Colorado, Nebraska, southern Indiana . . . Pennsylvania. We believe the persistently strong south winds of August pushed this stranger into our area. Last year similar winds brought us a Black Vulture (Iowa Bird Life, XXIX, p. 98).—HAROLD H. BURGESS, Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge, Titonka, Iowa.

New Publications of Illinois Natural History Survey.—We recommend two recent publications of the Natural History Survey Division, Urbana, Illinois. They are: "Hawks and Owls: Population Trends from Illinois Christmas Counts," by Richard R. Graber and Jack S. Golden (Biological Notes No. 41, 1960, 24 pp., 24 figs. including several fine photographs). "Winter Foods of the Bobwhite in Southern Illinois," by Edward J. Larimer (Biological Notes No. 2, 1960, 35 pp., 8 figs.).

"Our Bird Friends" in a Revised Edition.—A very useful booklet is the newly revised edition of "Introduction to Our Bird Friends," by L. B. Carson, published by the Bird Book Department, Capper Publications, Inc., 8th & Jackson Streets, Topeka, Kansas. It represents much value for the small price of 50¢ a copy. There are 100 short biographies of common birds, each with a line drawing of the species (an earlier edition, 1954, had just half this number). In addition, there is a four-page center spread showing 32 species in color. Orville O. Rice has made all the illustrations for the booklet, and the colored plates are in a particularly artistic and pleasing arrangement. There is a check-list at the back which tells at what time of year the birds may be seen, and is a tie-in with the concise, well-written text. Sponsored by a large publishing firm which can give it a wide distribution, the booklet is certain to do a great deal of good in an educational way.—F. J. P.

Bird Notes from Waterloo.—The Black Hawk Creek area was flooded a good deal of the time during the spring months, and was consequently attractive to bird life. On March 26, 1960, on a rainy, foggy and rather cold day, I visited the area and found Fox and Song Sparrows, Slate-colored Juncos, Killdeer, and two Woodcocks. I got a fairly good look at the last-named birds, and on the following day I had a much nearer, more satisfactory look at a single Woodcock. On April 10, I was again in the area and watched an exciting encounter between a Cooper's Hawk and a Ring-necked Pheasant. I saw a bundle of flopping, fighting birds on the ground in a thick growth of underbrush. Soon the feathers separated and a Cooper's Hawk flew up into the trees near me and a rooster pheasant shot out. Neither bird seemed to be hurt in any way, as far as I could tell.

A short evening stop at Big Marsh, near Parkersburg, April 10, revealed it was alive with wild ducks. I made out these species: Scaup, Golden-eye, Blue-winged Teal, Mallard, Canvasback, Shoveler, Pintail and Ring-necked Duck. Three Double-crested Cormorants flew over and several Pipits were found in almost the same area last year, near Big Marsh. On April 9, at Sweet Marsh near Tripoli, I found Bald Eagle, Pied-billed Grebe, Winter Wren, Herring Gull, Osprey, Bufflehead, Common and Red-breasted Mergansers. On April 23, 1960, I saw my first Prairie Warbler. It was in George Wyth State Park, at the edge of Cedar Falls. It was studied closely with binoculars and distinguishing markings were noted. I called several bird students about the bird, and Mrs. Russell Rugg was fortunate to see it also.—RUSSELL HAYS, 825 Franklin Street, Waterloo, Iowa.